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ABSTRACT

Based on questionnaires sent to a random sample of 140 debate coaches in Kansas in December 1973, three aspects of Kansas high school debate programs--general characteristics of programs active in debate, budget characteristics of these programs, and general characteristics of the professional staff associated with the programs--are examined. Ten different tables provide information on some of the debate program's general features; budget and school classifications; sampled debate program when viewed from a budget perspective; rankings given the different criteria used in setting budget figures; budget changes from 1973 to 1975 according to school size; budget changes from 1973 to 1975 according to budget size; ways in which money was spent for meals, lodging, and transportation; characteristics of the debate coaches; how Kansas coaches fare in remuneration by school and administrators; and recommended debate textbooks and handbooks. (HOD)

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The Nature of Kansas High School Debate Programs: A Survey[1]

Robert M. Smith*

Systematic surveys of debate programs are periodically needed to help concerned individuals and interested groups assess the status and direction of their programs and the overall, or general, status of state programs. The systematic nature of such surveys is useful in confirming or disconfirming the anecdotal, sometimes casual, information traded among fellow coaches at tournaments and various meetings. The purpose of this article is to describe characteristics of Kansas high school debate programs as identified in a systematic survey of such programs conducted in January of this year.

A questionnaire was constructed to determine the nature of three aspects of Kansas high school debate programs. The three aspects studied were: general characteristics of programs active in debate; budget characteristics of these programs; and general characteristics of the professional staff associated with the programs.

Questionnaires were sent to a random sample of 140 debate coaches in Kansas in December, 1973. Names of debate coaches were taken from the KSHSAA Membership Directory, 1973-74. The only feature affecting the sample choice was an attempt to balance the sample within high school classifications. A follow-up request was sent to debate coaches in January in order to improve on the percentage of questionnaires returned. The final results reported here represent ninety-three schools (66.43% of questionnaires originally sent). All classifications in the final sample are proportionally represented as they occur in the total number of programs in the state except for a slightly smaller proportion in the sample of 4A schools and a slightly larger proportion of 2A schools.

TABLE I

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF KANSAS HIGH SCHOOL DEBATE PROGRAMS

	Avg. for all classifications	School Size Class 5A	4A	3A	2A	A
Avg. Number of Students Involved	21.44	35.86	36.50	16.50	18.25	16.70
Avg. Number of Tournaments Attended	10.26	18.43	15.89	8.58	8.06	9.0

*Mr. Smith is Director of the Basic Oral Communication Program at Wichita State University.

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	Avg. for all classifications	School Size Class 5A	4A	3A	2A	A
Percent who Host Tournaments	60.71	85.71	80.0	73.68	45.95	54.55
Percent who Recruit Students for Program	70.9	85.71	60.0	80.0	67.57	66.67

Table I shows several general features of debate programs in Kansas high schools. The first two sets of figures identify the average number of tournaments attended by the school. The reader should note the similarity in the averages for 5A and 4A schools and for 3A, 2A, and A schools for both sets of figures.

There is some relationship here that is highlighted when budget figures are considered. If a debate director intends to give students experience, tournaments must be attended. Therefore, the more students one has in a program, the more tournaments one becomes obligated to attend in order to provide opportunity for experience. This relationship is considered a positive reflection on the value the director places on providing such opportunities. It is regulated to the extent the KSHSAA allows a student to attend only a set number of tournaments.

The third set of figures shown in Table I reflect who hosts tournaments. As can be seen, the larger schools tend to host more tournaments than smaller schools.

The fourth set of figures reflect recruiting tendencies by schools. A definition of recruitment was not given in the questionnaire and, obviously, no opportunity or potential can be exercised to recruit from other schools. Nevertheless, directors do give close attention to actual recruitment, apparently within their school. Two schools indicated they offer debate scholarships.

Size of school is only one perspective for studying debate programs. Size of budget is another, and often more interesting, perspective. Questionnaires in the sample were sorted according to the size of the budgets. Categories were combined into five divisions. Interestingly, size of budget does not completely relate to size of school. Table II shows the distribution of budget sizes and school classifications by percent of respondents from each school size.

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TABLE II

BUDGET AND SCHOOL CLASSIFICATIONS*

School Size/ Budget Size	0-$200	$201-$600	$601-$1,000	$1,000-$2,000	+$2,000
5A	0	12.5	0	50.0	37.5
4A	0	0	22.2	33.3	44.4
3A	16.67	38.89	16.67	22.2	5.6
2A	41.2	35.2	17.7	5.9	0
A	58.3	25.	8.3	0	8.3

*(figures are percent of schools by size and total across in rows)

Table III displays certain characteristics of the sampled debate programs when viewed from a budget perspective.

TABLE III

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF KANSAS HIGH SCHOOL DEBATE PROGRAMS: BUDGET SIZE

	$0-200	$201-600	$601-1,000	$1,000-2,000	+$2,000
Avg. Number of Students Involved	12.71	21.09	18.33	29.46	47.22
Avg. Number of Tournaments Attended	3.0	6.91	11.0	14.38	22.29
Avg. Number of Tournaments Desired for a Debater	4.91	5.05	5.25	5.08	5.33

The reader should note the almost linear relationship between size of budget and the number of students involved in the debate program. There is a slight implication that size of budget influences a supposed independent factor such as number of students involved in the program. This is not unusual. In a previously conducted survey of Pennsylvania high school debate programs the same relationship existed.[2] The third set of figures shows that dollars have a slight influence on the coach's concepts about the program. When asked to comment on the number of tournaments the coach feels is about right for the average debater, a very slight difference developed according to budget size. The KSHSAA rule limiting students to five tournaments certainly influences these

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figures. In the Pennsylvania study, there was a dramatic relationship between the number of tournament experiences desired for students and the size of a school's budget.

As the second set of figures shows, there is a positive linear relationship between the dollars available and the number of tournaments attended. Taken together, the "studnets involved" and the "tournaments attended" figures might suggest that larger budgets attract more students and provide for more tournament travel. Actually the figures produce a graph with obvious plateaus. Changes in budgets relate to significant changes in students and tournaments only when from 0-$200 budgets to larger budgets and when moving from $1,000-$2,000 budgets to larger budgets.

Where the money comes from and how it is spent are constant concerns of debate coaches. All schools in the sample receive 85% or more of their funds from the school system. This is very healthy and attractive situation for Kansas high schools. In a previous study conducted by FDRC sampling random high school programs in fifteen states, a large percentage of coaches had to rely on outside agencies, promotional sales, assorted school funding groups, and various combinations of sources. This meant considerable time, energy, and frustration was spent by coaches in stabilizing and creating a budget base. Such time is obviously taken from more worthwhile educational activities.

When relying on a single source, it is to the coach's advantage to know the criteria used in setting budget figures. When asked to rank six commonly considered criteria, the coaches generally agreed on how the administration or school board determines budget size. Table IV displays the rankings given the different criteria. Only schools in class 4A differ significantly in the rank ordering of criterion when rankings are sorted according to school size.

TABLE IV

PERCEIVED PRIORITIES FOR FUNDING DECISIONS

	Classifications					Budget Size				
	5A	4A	3A	2A	A	0-$200	$201-$600	$601-$1,000	$1,000-$2,000	+$2,000
No. Students Involved	1	3	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
Past Budget Size	2	1	2	2	3	3	1	1	1	1
Number Tournaments Attended	3	4	3	3	3	2	3	4	3	4
Reputation of Program	4	2	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	3

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	Classifications					Budget Size				
	5A	4A	3A	2A	A	0-$200	$201-$600	$601-$1,000	$1,000-$2,000	+$2,000
Inflation	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	3	5	5
Win-Loss Records	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6

When rankings are sorted according to budget size, a different ordering develops. Except for the smallest budgets, decisions about future budgets are based on past budget sizes first and number of students second. Any coach recognizes there are obvious advantages and disadvantages to such decision-making. As the reader will recall from the discussion before, there is some relationship between budget size and students involved. If decisions about the budget are dependent on static budget size and those decisions affect dynamic factors (particularly the number of students served), then the potential for growth is severely limited.

Two very interesting points are reflected in these rankings. How many times have coaches said that trophies were important to their program in the eyes of the administration? How many arguments have been raised between coaches and the KSHSAA as to the trophy allocation rules? Yet, the single most constant feature in Table IV is the low priority given to winning and losing debate rounds. This factor is ranked last in all school classifications and all budget classifications. The second interesting point is the surprisingly low priority given inflation as a factor in budget decision-making.

As part of a continuing monitoring of debate programs, FDRC has discovered in national studies that downward fluctuations in budget allocations are a myth. In surveys at both high school and college levels, no serious trend to cutting budgets could be discovered. Tables V and VI show the data collected from Kansas high schools. All figures are given in percentages of schools responding.

TABLE V

BUDGET CHANGES FOR PERIOD FROM 1973 TO 1975: SCHOOL SIZE*

	5A	4A	3A	2A	A
Compared to 1972-73; the 1973-74 Budget was:					
Increased	14.29	10	27.78	46.88	9.09
The Same	14.29	90	61.11	40.63	81.82
Decreased	71.43	0	11.11	12.50	9.09

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	5A	4A	3A	2A	A
Compared to 1973-74; the 1974-75 Budget is to be:					
Increased	14.29	10	27.78	34.29	8.33
The Same	71.43	90	66.67	54.29	91.67
Decreased	14.29	0	5.56	11.43	0

*(figures are percentage of schools responding)

Table V displays fluctuations according to school size. Except for 5A schools, few schools indicated their 1973-74 budget was lower than the previous year's. The high percentage for 5A schools is an artifact of Wichita 5A schools having a budget cut just before the survey was conducted and having a reinstatement of the cut just after the survey was conducted. When adjustments are made, the 5A schools show a decrease for 28% of the schools, still a fairly high figure. Next year's expected budgets look fairly stable with few reported decreases expected. Over the past three years, only three schools in the total sample showed a two year consecutive decrease while nine schools showed two consecutive increases.

Table VI shows the data when sorted by budget size. The figures are in the same general direction as indicated in Table V. The largest fluctuations are in the budgets of $1,000-$2,000. Again, this is partially due to the 5A schools in Wichita.

TABLE VI

BUDGET CHANGES FOR PERIOD FROM 1973 TO 1975: BUDGET SIZE*

	0-$200	$201-600	$601-$1,000	$1,000-$2,000	+$2,000
Compared to 1972-73, the 1973-74 Budget was:					
Increased	30	31.58	18.18	16.67	44.44
The Same	60	57.89	54.55	50.00	44.44
Decreased	10	10.53	27.27	33.33	11.11
Compared to 1973-74, the 1974-75 Budget was:					
Increased	40	22.73	16.67	15.38	11.11
The Same	50	68.18	75.0	61.54	77.77
Decreased	10	9.1	8.33	23.08	11.11

*(figures are percentage of schools responding)

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In general, budgets are relatively stable in Kansas. However, this stability is misleading since inflation virtually converts a stable budget into a reduced budget when the budget purchasing power is computed.

Several coaches took time to comment on the budget decision-making process and their feelings should be noted here. Many coaches wrote that they have excellent relations with their administrations and that money is not a problem. As one coach noted: "If the expense is justifiable, the money is provided. We have excellent administration and community support, but it is a mutual trust that has been established over the years." Overall, such trust relationships seem to be a hallmark of Kansas programs. Studies of other states do not reflect the positive, healthy attitude so prevalent in Kansas.

How money is spent is an important topic. Three distinct areas of expenses were studied in this survey: expenditures for meals, lodging and transportation. Table VII displays the way money is spent for these three items. Respondents were asked to indicate whether their budget pays for all, some, or none of the expenses for these items.

TABLE VII

BUDGET EXPENDITURES BY PERCENT OF RESPONDANTS

School Classifications	Meals Paid For			Lodging Paid For			Transportation Paid For		
	All	Some	None	All	Some	None	All	Some	None
5A	0	28.57	71.43	100	0	0	42.86	42.86	14.29
4A	20	40	40	80	10	10	90	10	0
3A	42.11	42.11	15.79	78.95	5.26	15.79	84.21	0	15.79
2A	30.30	36.36	33.33	58.82	8.82	32.35	85.29	8.82	5.88
A	25	25	50	58.33	0	41.67	91.67	0	8.33
Budget Classifications									
$0-200	16.67	16.67	66.67	23.17	0	70.83	75	4.17	20.83
200-600	30.43	34.78	34.78	52.17	17.39	30.43	82.61	4.35	13.04
600-1,000	41.67	41.67	16.67	100	0	0	83.33	8.33	8.33
1-2,000	30.77	30.77	38.46	92.31	7.69	0	69.23	23.08	7.69
+2,000	33.33	44.44	22.22	100	0	0	100	0	0

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Only a couple of factors are apparent in these percentages. Whether a school pays any of the cost for lodging is somehow related to the size of the school. Since many of the small schools also have the smaller budgets, it is not surprising to find the same relationship in the lower half of the table. However, expenditures for meals is not similarly related to either size of school or budget. It is worth noting this apparent feeling that eating is a low priority expense. Even those schools with the largest budgets do not show a marked tendency to absorb these costs.

All factors considered, the 3A schools and/or those schools with $601-1,000 budgets do the best job in absorbing tournament travel expenses. However, for these schools to absorb these expenses, they have to reduce the number of students involved in the program (See Table I and III).

The third part of this survey attempted to discover professional background characteristics of the program directors. Table VIII shows some general features of Kansas coaches. The figure for median years in the activity indicates the typical coach is relatively new to coaching.

TABLE VIII

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DEBATE COACH

	5A	4A	3A	2A	A
Avg. Years in Activity	6.43	5.6	5.18	4.08	4.5
Median Years in Activity	4	4	2	2	4
% Who Consider Coaching as a Career	28.57	70	52.63	66.67	72.73
% Who Have Debated in:					
College	85.71	20	36.84	40.54	25
High School	28.57	30	31.58	43.24	33.33
% Who Have No Debate Experience	14.29	70	61.11	54.29	57.43
% Who Have Taken Courses in:					
Argumentation	100	70	68.42	81.10	75
Debate or Forensic Coaching	57.14	70	66.67	70.27	58.33

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The percent who plan to make a career commitment to this activity suggests a healthy and dedicated professional attitude. The low percentage, however, for 5A high school coaches should cause some concern. In comparison with national figures, this percentage is the lowest yet discovered and is particularly low when compared against schools of comparable size. The percentage figures for those having no previous debate experience is fairly high for A through 4A schools. However, the debate educational background of Kansas coaches, as represented by courses in argumentation and/or courses in directing debate or forensic programs, is very high. In fact, these figures are among the highest in the nation, based of FDRC surveys.

Table IX shows how Kansas coaches fair in remuneration by school boards and administrations. The figures given are percents of respondents. Across these features, 3A schools are clearly in a favored position.

TABLE IX

REMUNERATIVE SUPPORT OF LOCAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIONS

	5A	4A	3A	2A	A
% Receiving Released Time For Debate or Forensics	28.57	50	68.42	42.86	41.67
% Receiving Salary Adjustment For Debate or Forensics	85.71	90	94.74	75	75
% Receiving Time And Salary Adjustments	28.57	50	68.42	42.86	41.67
% Receiving Neither Compensations	14.29	10	0	18.92	25

The sample of A schools shows the largest percentage of coaches who are not receiving either form of compensation. The 5A schools show the lowest percent receiving released time and the lowest percent receiving both forms of compensation. When correlated with the percent who consider this activity as a career commitment, there is a relationship seen in other surveys: the reduction in the kind of commitment given by the coach is reciprocated by the kind of commitment given by the administration. However, the reverse has not necessarily been shown. By looking at a comparison of the 3A school percentages, the reader can see that a commitment by the administration does not always get a reciprocated commitment by the coach.

One final series of questions attempted to discover what textbooks and handbooks are used by debate coaches. Respondents listed eight

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different texts they would want their debaters to use. The top two choices are identical with the top choices given in a national survey conducted by FDRC.[3] Ten handbooks were listed. The first three choices are identical with the choices given in the same national survey. Table X shows the listings for texts and handbooks according to the frequency of responses given each book.

TABLE X

RECOMMENDED DEBATE TEXTBOOKS AND HANDBOOKS*

Textbooks		Handbooks	
R. Kood, Strategic Debate	(18)	National Textbook Corp.	(12)
A. J. Freeley, Argumentation and Debate	(10)	J. Weston Walch	(7)
O. Bauer, Fundamentals of Debate	(5)	Springboards	(6)

*(figures are frequency of recommendation)

As has occurred in all other surveys conducted by FDRC, these questions prompt respondents to comment on the use and general value of handbooks. Fully 57% of the respondents reacted "negatively" to the request by not listing a handbook, commenting on the value of a handbook, or otherwise indicating no preference for handbooks. This high percentage is more common for college coaches. Past surveys show 39% of the high school coaches reject handbooks.

This survey attempted to discover a vast number of characteristics about Kansas high school debate programs. Many topics have been covered and many more have only been hinted. The survey did not include all Kansas programs but attempted to representatively sample the programs. The presentation of the data suffers in part from the perspective of the author and the limited space available.

Keeping these limitations in mind as qualifications to any conclusions, several statements seem in order. The most distinct feature seen in this survey is the extremely favorable position Kansas coaches have. They are generally well trained and committed with active and dynamic programs regardless of what kinds of schools they are associated with and what kinds of budgets they have available. Most importantly, the debate program, in general, has community support throughout the state. In part this is due to the positive role of the KSHSAA and the Kansas Speech Communication Association, and the active desire of debate coaches to maintain certain high standards. The most exemplarary group of coaches are those in the small A schools. Here is a group of professionally dedicated teachers who are asked, in general, to provide a top class program with severely restricted funds and little, if any, tangible compensation for the effort.

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After reviewing this mound of data, reading the additional comments given, and interviewing many coaches, one final personal note must be added. Kansas school administrators, in spite of possibly feeling their faculty members are always gone from the classroom and are always asking for more funds or more materials, have made good investments in good people that are paying off in educational benefits for their students.

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FOOTNOTES

[1]This research project was conducted in cooperation with the Forensic Data Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The directors of the Center are T. H. Harris, Rutgers University, R. L. Towne, Temple University, and the author.

[2]Thomas E. Harris, Robert M. Smith and Ralph L. Towne, "The Nature of Pennsylvania High School Forensic Programs: A Survey," The Pennsylvania Speech Communication Annual, 29 (1973), 39-47.

[3]Ralph Towne, Robert Smith and Thomas Harris, "Recommended Debate Texts and Handbooks: A Survey," Speaker and Gavel, 11 (1974), 52-54.